

(Washington, D.C.) - Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) today voted to strengthen our military and provide an historic new commitment of resources for America's veterans. The Military Construction & Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill was approved by an overwhelming bipartisan majority and includes record-funding for veterans' health care, support for military facilities and new measures to hold the Department of Veterans Affairs accountable.

"America's veterans are our heroes and we must honor them with both our words and our deeds," said Congressman Rodriguez. "I am proud to support legislation that will finally ensure our veterans have the resources and benefits they have earned."

The 2008 Military Construction & Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill includes the largest single funding increase in the 77 year history of the Veterans Administration. The bill will:

- Significantly reduce the 400,000 claims backlog for veterans waiting for disability and other benefits by adding more than 1,100 new claims processors.
- Support critical maintenance of VA health care facilities.
Make five polytrauma centers and three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) fully operational this year. The centers will care for those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Support the development and operation of a toll-free telephone and web-based hotline for veterans to report on deficiencies in VA medical facilities and care.

The bill also provides resources to support military construction projects and ensure America's servicemen and women having more effective training facilities, and better housing, health care and day care facilities. The legislation:

- Provides better housing and training facilities when troops return from combat through an unprecedented \$21.4 billion investment in military construction, family housing, and the Base Realignment and Closure process (BRAC).
- Assist in growing our military forces and begins the process of adding 65,000 Army,

27,000 Marine, and 9,000 National Guard and Reserve troops.

- Supports the relocation of 70,000 troops.

The Military Construction & Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill also increases funding for Inspector General for VA to improve services for veterans and their families and to prevent and deter potential waste, fraud and inefficiencies.

The legislation has won widespread support and praise from America's leading veterans' organizations including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Officers Association of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, AmVets, National Association for Uniformed Services and Disabled American Veterans.

Congressman Rodriguez serves on the House Veterans Affairs Committee.